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Rikers Island detainees expose lack of medical care while in custody

BY GLORIA PAZMINO | NEW YORK CITY

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Shiva Ramdhanie was arrested on August 11 and charged with a non-violent violation of his parole. He was sent to Rikers and every day since, he's been in fear for his life.

"I'm not trying to get out of jail, I am trying to get out of dying," Ramdhanie said on a phone interview while on the island.

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"I am trying to get out of death and it's coming for me. My eye is infected, I have fractures. I just, I don't know how to explain this," Ramdhanie said.

After being stabbed, Ramdhanie says he managed to get to the clinic with the help of other inmates after they managed to get a hold of jail cell keys.

"No medical attention at all for hours until one of the inmates got the key and I limped down with the help of other inmates to medical," Ramdhanie said.

Ramdhanie's claims illustrate just one aspect of what is being described as a humanitarian crisis on Rikers Island. '

Zachary Katznelson, Executive Director of the Independent Commission on NYC Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, which drafted a plan to close Rikers Island said people in Rikers are currently being denied basic rights such as access to food, a clean place to sleep in and access to basic healthcare.

"It is a fundamental constitutional right and right under New York city and state law that anyone who is held in jail has to be treated fairly and humanely, has to be given basic medical care and fundamentally has to be kept alive," Katznelson said.

So far this year, 11 people have died while in custody of the department, including Isaabdul Karim, a 42 year old father of two who died Sunday. Karim had been held on Rikers before. He filed a lawsuit against the city for his treatment while in custody, according to reports.

Karim, who required the use of a wheelchair and complained of chest pains before his death was kept in an intake cell for ten days after his arrest, crowded with other inmates where he contracted COVID-19.

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held for days.

"The toilets didn't work so you know people were relieving themselves in garbage bags," Ramdhanie said.

NY1 has spoken with the families of four other inmates who have all reported a lack of proper medical care for chronic health conditions or no medical attention after their loved ones have sustained injuries.

Healthcare on Rikers is administered through Correctional Health Services -- an arm of the city's Health and Hospitals system. But sources on the island say medical services cannot be adequately provided if there aren't enough officers to escort detainees and ensure the safety of medical staff.

On Tuesday, Mayor de Blasio said two clinics and an additional housing unit had been opened on the island to alleviate the overcrowding in intake.

"Everyone must go through intake in less than 24 hours," de Blasio said.

State Attorney General Letitia James visited the Island Tuesday along with the Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn District Attorneys. She issued a statement saying her office is examining all legal options to immediately address the crisis on the island.

Meanwhile Ramdhanie continues without the medical help he's asked for.

"It has come to the point of no return, there is no way this is Armageddon in here," he said. "Devastation, chaos and evil it's hell in here."

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